

Schools will ask county to suspend impact fee

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The Marion County School Board on Tuesday voted to formally ask the County Commission to suspend the 2012-13 impact fee, stating there's not enough growth to justify the tax on residential development.

Though the decision was expected, considering the board reached a unanimous consensus last month to suspend the fee for a second straight year, members had to officially vote on the matter. The suspension of the fee, which must be formally approved by the County Commission, passed without comment.

The suspension may send a confusing message to residents, considering that the board just recently decided to ask voters to consider two half-mill referendums to generate more money for the district.

The explanation is simply that the impact fee can only be used for growth-related items, such as property or brick-and-mortar buildings, while one of the half-mill capital taxes would primarily be used to maintain aging buildings.

The other half-mill operations referendum is needed to help fund the district's programs, with the exception of teacher salaries. If passed, each referendum is expected to generate about \$7 million.

The board says it needs the half-mill capital tax revenue to help repair those aging schools now that the state has stopped issuing Public Education Capital Outlay revenue.

"The impact fee can only be used for new growth," board member Ron Crawford said. "We are not experiencing that kind of growth. The millage can be used to help maintain our buildings, the impact fee can't."

The impact fee in 2010-11, the last time it was collected, was \$2,217 for a multi-family housing unit, \$4,061 for single-family homes and \$3,543 for mobile homes.

Nearly \$11.5 million in impact fees was collected from 2005-06 through 2010-11. The district still has nearly \$5.8 million of that money available to spend on growth-related capital projects, including land purchases.

The only new school under construction is Legacy Elementary School in Silver Springs Shores, which is scheduled to open for the 2013-14 school year. That school is funded with half-cent sales tax revenue earmarked for the project.

The half-cent sales tax was passed by voters in 2004. It was launched Jan. 1, 2005 and ended on Dec. 30, 2009. Money from that revenue source helped build four schools in the county.

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